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ABSTRACT

The mutual interests identified by participants in this conference on the business community and Hispanic Americans, and suggestions for actions by corporations and individuals to further those interests all fit under three key terms: awareness, access, and inclusion. Participants agreed that awareness of Hispanics' dynamic population growth in the United States--and what this means for the economy, the work force, the consumer market, and supporting institutions of society--lags behind the reality. Hispanics themselves and aware members of the business community must work to spread the message. It was also felt that access to jobs, education, training, credit, capital, and leadership opportunities for Hispanics must be dramatically improved. Business, rather than sitting passively and waiting for schools to deliver suitable employees must step up efforts to recruit, train, and promote Hispanic workers and professionals. Finally, participants concurred that along with access must come inclusion, meaning that the business community must work to avoid any pattern of discrimination and be committed to seeking out Hispanic job candidates, suppliers, and subcontractors who can meet the needs of business. (CMG)

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HISPANIC-AMERICANS AND THE BUSINESS CORPORATION--

THEIR MUTUAL INTERESTS

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Report

of an

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Awareness. Access. Inclusion.

Those three words embrace the many suggestions for action voiced by participants in the Aspen Institute's conference on "Hispanic-Americans and the Business Corporation--Their Mutual Interests." The conference, one of a continuing series concerned with advancing the participation of Hispanics in key sectors of American life, took place May 11-14, 1983, at the Wye Plantation, the Aspen Institute's meeting complex on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

Awareness

Awareness of Hispanics' dynamic population growth in the U.S.--and of what this means for the economy, the work force, the consumer market, and the supporting institutions of society--still lags behind the profound changes actually taking place.

On the West Coast, in the Southwest, and in the Miami area, the visible impact of increasing numbers of Hispanics and the evident use of Spanish in many community settings are beginning to overcome the widespread failure to recognize the significance and scale of Hispanics' disproportionately fast-growing role. But in the Midwest and the Northeast, Hispanics might still as well be invisible insofar as their particular interests and contributions gain public attention.

Getting business to consider what it can do to advance the full integration of Hispanics into the American enterprise system requires first that business leaders see that a demographic shift of great importance is underway, making it worth their while, even imperative, to develop their mutual interests with Hispanics.

Hispanics themselves can take the lead in promoting the necessary awareness, but members of the business community who have already awakened to the new reality must also reach out to their colleagues with the same message.

Access

Access to jobs, education, training, credit, capital, and leadership opportunities for Hispanics must be dramatically improved before Hispanics will enjoy an even chance with other Americans to realize their personal talents and to compete in the marketplace.

While providing such access is as much a responsibility for education and other social institutions as it is for business, business cannot afford to wait passively for the schools to deliver potential employees who are equal to the requirements of available jobs--or for the welfare system to support consumer demand. It is in business'

interest no less than Hispanics' that corporations contribute toward greater educational opportunity and achievement for Hispanics and that they step up their efforts to recruit, train, and promote the Hispanic workers and professionals who will at the same time be accounting for an ever larger share of their markets.

Inclusion

Inclusion means making good on the promise implied by access, namely, that upon showing of intelligence, talent, hard work, commitment, and resourcefulness, Hispanics will be sought and welcomed into the business life of the nation--including the upper reaches of management and board membership--as much as other Americans of comparable skill.

The testimony of Hispanic participants in this conference suggested that even individuals of distinguished academic and professional records face greater obstacles than do their majority-group counterparts in getting to be included at levels of corporate responsibility commensurate with their abilities.

This last step to achieving full participation, if it often falters on the unconsciously discriminatory behavior of those who make hiring, promotion, purchasing, and investment decisions, can be assisted only marginally by regulations or threats of lawsuits. It depends on the determination of business people themselves consciously to avoid any pattern of discrimination in their choices of workers, colleagues, and other firms with which to do business. More than that, it depends on their commitment to seek out Hispanic job candidates, suppliers, and sub-contractors who can meet the needs of the business. And that commitment will remain strong over time only if companies make their success in meeting it a test of their executives' performance.

Mutual Interests

Awareness of Hispanics, access for Hispanics, and inclusion of Hispanics were aims that non-Hispanic participants in the Aspen Institute conference endorsed as well. These aims, they felt, should not only be accepted as a part of the corporation's social responsibility, but also treated simply as a matter of good business. It was with this perspective--that Hispanic-Americans and U.S. business corporations have much to gain from each other--that the group developed the following list of areas where their mutual interests figure most prominently:

¶ The need for structural integration of Hispanics from

the corporate board on down, not by ghettoizing approaches but by involving Hispanics in all aspects of business, not just those identified with Hispanic markets or personnel matters.

- The vigorous pursuit of Hispanics for management-level work, including special efforts to provide executive training.

- Corporate involvement with Hispanic community organizations and concerns, especially but not exclusively in fund raising.

- Building networks of contacts and regular business links to encourage the procurement of materials and services from Hispanic firms.

- Targeted marketing and advertising to Hispanic consumers, especially for the side benefits that flow to Hispanic agencies, retailers, and other businesses.

- Concerted approaches to public policy matters, both administrative and legislative--for example, the bills to deal with the problems of illegal immigration.

- Exposing corporate leaders, especially in areas where it is needed most, to the changing character of Hispanic interests--by meetings like the one reported on here as well as by other means.

- Improvement of educational offerings and incentives for achievement at all levels.

- Corporate-sponsored programs to focus young Hispanics' training and career aims.

- Support for the value of bilingual abilities--not just for Hispanics, who must indeed master English in order to take full part in the life of U.S. society, but for all Americans who must learn to compete and work in an increasingly interdependent world economy.

- Ensuring that Hispanic projects and services are included among earmarked corporate contributions.

- Greater publicity for new and existing vehicles of cooperation between Hispanics and business.

Action and Advice

From aims and mutual interests, the conference participants proceeded to ideas for action. These ideas were contributed from all around the discussion table in a joint effort to lay out the full spectrum of practical possibilities. Some suggestions are geared to the powers and influence of corporations acting as institutions, some to the role of the individual, both in business and in other sectors. They are listed here in the order in which they were raised:

- Cooperation between Hispanics and business won't just happen: It has to be worked at. It depends on resolving the activist agenda of Hispanics with the natural urge of business to maintain the social peace it needs to thrive.

- Corporations should welcome joint ventures with Hispanic firms--for example, in real estate development, product distributorships, franchises, and pilot projects.

- Corporations should ensure greater involvement of Hispanics not only by commitments at the top level, but also by leadership at the levels of personnel management and field operations where good intentions, if they are to mean anything, must be put into practice.

- Every effort should recognize the individuals who can be the role models for Hispanics, helping them to pull together and to strengthen the prospects for promotion from within existing business organizations.

- Leading Hispanic groups should help corporations in their area to gain a working knowledge of the Hispanic community organizations with which they might work. Even if new jobs are scarce now, this can be a time for stirring interest and encouraging preparation for future jobs.

- One participant, observing that the break-up of the Bell system means that Western Electric will now have to compete with other equipment suppliers to meet the needs of the new regional phone companies, personally offered to assist Hispanic firms in gaining entry to procurement channels.

- More events that bring Hispanics and non-Hispanics together should be supported: Quite apart from the specific projects or programs they foster, they help to

increase the "comfort level" of everyone involved, Hispanic and non-Hispanic alike. The Aspen Institute itself was urged to play a continuing role in this respect.

- Corporations that take initiatives toward improving relations between business and Hispanic communities should be rewarded, not taken for granted, by the leadership in those communities. Said one executive, "Business people love to hear good things said about themselves, and with such encouragement will do even more." An Hispanic participant agreed: "A $35 plaque can go a long way: It can lead to millions in return."

- Corporations can work with government as well as Hispanic organizations to create joint ventures.

- Business leaders should actively recruit Hispanics for membership and activity in such mainstream groups as the Chamber of Commerce.

- Corporate executives should examine where their procurement monies are presently going, and if they find that Hispanic firms are not represented, they should reach out to them, perhaps by holding seminars on how to enter the bidding process.

- Placing ads in Hispanic publications will help corporations to forge links with a spectrum of Hispanic businesses.

- Public policy studies on employment, investment, and other business development issues can benefit from the support of corporate public affairs departments at the local level and can yield influence at the national level as well.

- Corporate public affairs departments will also find it in their interests to hire Hispanics, whose powers of access--to the corporate structure and to the community --will then operate to mutual benefit.

- Corporations should bring their influence to bear on improving Federal and state support for high-quality public education, including a positive approach to the teaching and achievement of bilingual proficiencies.

- Corporations should ask organized labor to join in sup-

port of Hispanic development efforts, including steps to protect Hispanics' civil liberties, to assist immigrants in entering the mainstream labor force, to set standards for treatment at the workplace, and to bridge class gaps.

- Corporate executives who have already come to understand the needs and opportunities posed by the growing importance of Hispanics in the U.S. should "really proselytize" their colleagues in the business community and help to focus the political power necessary to achieve relevant public policy aims.

Personal Views

In the closing minutes of the conference, several participants offered personal comments that are worth quoting to reflect the range and depth of views represented:

--From an educator (Hispanic) to corporate leaders: "Here are five points I urge you to keep in mind:

1) Listen to us even when we get contentious.
2) Protect yourself against the school of talk that refers to whole groups of people in terms of 'mentalities.'
3) Learn from the experience of other institutions --to see what not to do as well as what might be right to do. Most schools, for example, programmed us to fail. To counter that, introduce internships, mentorships, apprenticeships.
4) Promote networking in all its forms-- sponsorship, brokering, door opening.
5) Since most Hispanic organizations are new and small, support and work with them--or there will only be more fragmentation of effort."

--From an executive of a national retail chain: "It's easiest for a corporation to respond on these issues when its bottom line--the stockholders' interests-- coincide with social responsibilities... I have been made sensitive by this conference to problems I did not know existed, and now I have a larger network, too, through which to work on them."

--From a banking perspective: "There must be a flexible

approach to what corporations are asked to do. They will respond in different ways, especially if they deal with different classes: the highly-educated vs. the unskilled."

--From the executive of another national retailer: "The big issue is how we can work through corporations to help Hispanics help themselves."

--From a social researcher: "There have been courageous statements made here on the spirit of enterprise development in the Hispanic community. In the past the issues have been defined by others whose viewpoint has been anti-enterprise. We should underscore the opportunities that greet Hispanics in the American enterprise system--we should not stress getting grants. We should honor the attitude summed up in the statement: 'Don't give me a fish--teach me how to fish.'"

--From an energy executive: "I'm impressed that as the conference went on, the term, 'corporate America,' receded as the terms, 'access,' 'inclusion,' and 'networking,' took hold in our discussions. There is no monolithic corporate America: Corporations vary tremendously. And you don't always need the CEO: Other executives can be very critical to the process--and they have to be to get results. Joint ventures are a fine idea, but they have to meet tough tests of a business nature--they cannot be justified on social grounds alone. Corporate philanthrophy is a limited instrument, too--we are deluged with requests. We have to keep working on the most productive focus for advancing Hispanics in business. In my view, the most significant opening made here was the offer of assistance to Hispanic firms that are willing to compete in the telecommunications equipment supply channels for the new regional phone companies."

--From a broadcaster (Hispanic): "There is nothing to fear in the evident diversity of views and values among Hispanics, just as there is nothing to be gained by trying to define all Hispanic interests in the same terms. While corporate leaders' awareness of Hispanics must be broadened and deepened, Hispanics' awareness of business realities must also be promoted."

In line with that last comment, there emerged a list of

things that Hispanics in particular should do:

- Expose Hispanics to the corporate world; bring more of them onto boards, committees, and projects; today's leaders make a mistake in trying to cover all the roles of community representation themselves--they would do better to make way in some spots for younger individuals.
- Educate the community at large to the role of corporations and the opportunities they offer.
- Identify Hispanic entrepreneurs, trade assocations, etc., in ways that bring them in touch with each other and to the attention of the business world in general.
- Cultivate networking among Hispanics themselves.
- Invite responsive corporate executives to serve as members on Hispanic community boards and projects.
- Build on the strength of existing institutions and organizations.
- "Take an Anglo to lunch."

More to Come

The conference group was unanimous in stating that a meeting of this sort, bringing high-level Hispanic and non-Hispanic leaders together with an emphasis on corporate involvement, should be part of a continuing process. In fact, a conference on "Hispanic-Americans and Education," to include strong corporate representation, was already scheduled for July 5-9, 1983, at Baca Grande, the Aspen Institute's new conference center in southern Colorado (a report of that conference is also available on request.)

It was subsequently decided that the Aspen Institute Conference on Hispanic-Americans and the Business Corporation should be an annual event. The companies, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic, that have been supporters through 1983 have now pledged both to renew their own support for 1984 and to find in each case a new company to match that support. They are making special efforts to enroll companies that will give the conference a truly nationwide profile. Interested companies are invited to contact Michael Rice, Aspen Institute, 717 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10022, or (212) 759-1053.

Aspen Institute Conference
on
HISPANIC-AMERICANS AND THE BUSINESS CORPORATION--
THEIR MUTUAL INTERESTS
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